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ABSTRACT

Including the introduction, this document is a collection of seven short papers that discuss facets of consumer education (CE). The Introduction defines CE and lists five assumptions used throughout the report (e.g., CE is generally understood, but not precisely defined enough for the people implementing it to have a uniform understanding; schools or media are not integral to CE, but can be involved). The Introduction concludes that the state-of-the-art in CE is severely disappointing. Paper 2 discusses the potential effect of CE. Listed are ten short (two-to-five-line) examples called "actions," which describe a particular consumer behavior (e.g., buying unbranded aspirin and saving 75%); following each action are brief discussions of that action's implication for (1) the marketplace, (2) consumer welfare, and (3) consumer behavior and values. The third paper lists eleven major roadblocks to CE (e.g., national consumer advocate organizations having not mounted a significant campaign or effort to create or implement a federal consumer education program). Paper 4, Perspectives on the Content of Career Education, notes that CE is partial preparation for and guidance in the art of living and offers an analysis of educational fields that most directly influence CE. Paper 5 gives a brief history of CE and lists major developments in two time periods--1920-1950 and 1965-1975. The latter is listed year by year. The sixth paper (the most extensive of the seven) surveys institutional roles and potentials and makes recommendations. The last paper briefly identifies future alternatives for the development of CE. (VB)

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CONSUMER EDUCATION: A POSITION ON THE STATE OF THE ART

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Foreword

The status of consumer education is exciting for its potential. It offers little current realization of that potential.

In view of the creation of an Office of Consumers' Education in the U.S. Office of Education, friends of consumer education can be hopeful for a major breakthrough in national priorities, attention, and the ultimate test, financial resources.

Consumer education is an idea not always easily identified in practice. Many persons are engaged in activities in the field without much awareness of their common bond. Some stand out, however, in the experience of the investigator. One is Virginia H. Knauer, former Special Assistant to the President and generous employer, whose office has been a prime mover in developments since 1969. Another is Sandra L. Willett, Executive Director, National Consumers League, and former Director for Consumer Education for Mrs. Knauer, whose determination to see that everyone becomes an educated consumer, regardless of geography, cultural barriers, or income, can move even official Washington. A special credit goes to Professor Lillian H. Mohr of Florida State University for her manuscript review beyond all others' efforts.

Three persons gave of themselves directly to the original drafts of the paper. Vera Martin, home economist and counselor at Broadmoor Senior High School, Baton Rouge, Louisiana and a Director of the Louisiana Consumers' League, provided inspiration through her enthusiasm as well as more than ten years of uphill experience as an innovator in the classroom. In the context of the exasperating dearth of resources available to the individual consumer education instructor, she has no known peer. E. Ruth Rodman, Coordinator of Consumer Affairs Education for Philadelphia, aided the project because her successes have been unparalleled as a supervisor, implementor of programs, and advocate at all administrative levels from the state through to the local teachers. She would accept such a description as praise for her marvelous staff. Edna DeCoursey Johnson, Director of the Consumer Services Program of the Baltimore Urban League, kept the report oriented to its ultimate goal of helping real, live people because she toils in the all-too-real immediate world of the low income community and its consumer education needs.

All of these people deserve credit for the strong points of the report. The final writing and editorial decisions with their inevitable shortcomings are the responsibility of the primary author.

August 15, 1977 Lee Richardson

Introduction

The market is a place set apart where men may deceive each other.

-- Diogenes (412-323 BC)

Consumer education is today understood generally as the sum of the concepts, understandings and information to enable the individual to utilize available economic and personal resources for the satisfaction of personal wants and needs.

The implications of this apparently innocuous statement are enormously complex, yet the concept of consumer education is relatively easily understood by anyone aware of the general meaning of the familiar words "education" and "consumer." In today's context, consumer education is reducible to the notion of preparation as an informed acquirer and user of goods and services. The impetus for renewed concern with the subject in recent years is the consumer movement (or consumerism) and its focus on achieving the rights of consumers primarily in the marketplace.*

Some of the important assumptions used throughout this report include:

1. Consumer education, while a generally understood concept, is not precisely defined enough to assure uniform understanding among the persons who could implement it.

2. No particular institutions such as schools or media are necessarily integral to the definition and thus to the conduct of consumer education programs. All of these institutions nonetheless can be involved.

3. The individual (and groups to which individuals belong such as families, sexes, or races) is the focus of consumer education -- not business, government, or other institutional consumers who do not acquire and use goods and services for personal purposes.

4. Economic and personal assets are the resources available for the individual's choices and uses as a consumer. These controllable variables include income, wealth, personal attributes, including the physical, spiritual and mental, free goods (air, for example), time, and marketplace goods and services. Economics in this context may be viewed as the allocation of scarce resources for the purpose of satisfying ultimate consumers.

*John F. Kennedy, in his consumer message to Congress, March 15, 1962, identified the rights to health and safety, to be informed, to choose, and to be heard. No one since has significantly improved this statement of consumer movement ideology.

5. Wants and needs are distinct concepts and differ with various observers. Wants are desires or explicit expressions of demand for goods and services. Needs on the other hand are less easily identified. Needs are not always known to the individual and thus in order to determine appropriate choices necessary to achieve acceptable goals, they may have to be defined by someone else. A person may "want" to purchase marijuana, sugar, a bushel of oats, or a bucket of nails, but others may question the "need" for such products "wanted" by the particular individual.*

Consumer education is concerned with the daily lives of unique people living in varied environments. All of these individuals must of necessity make numerous consumer decisions daily. Consumer decisions are often very personal: the decision-maker often acts alone, but with significant pressure and learning from family, friends, sales people, TV, and incalculable other current and past influences. The American consumer chooses from the offerings of thousands of manufacturers, middlemen, and service organizations whose combined skills and knowledge dwarf the resources and information available to the buyers of their products. Consumers have the general right to buy or not to buy as well as the potential to increase the information and education resources available to themselves to help cope with the market.

Consumers repeatedly make unwise choices that affect their financial well-being, their levels and standards of living, their safety and health, their family life, and their self-concept. Consumer education therefore offers hope for much social improvement through increasing personal purchasing power, reducing the numbers of bad marketplace experiences, and raising the overall efficiency of the market system.

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*"The object of consumer behavior is to make sound decisions to the satisfaction of the individual's wants." This statement from the perspective of the individual consumer (as opposed to any objectively determined or socially derived needs standard) is the orientation of the business system, particularly marketing. It emphasizes the ultimate unchallengeable authority of individual choice; however the priorities are decided upon by the individual. The lack of a social consensus in literature on the subject of consumer need priorities underlies this orientation. Private choice is the heart of the free market philosophy implicit in the literature of business management. The quotation above is taken from the best selling textbook, Consumer Behavior: Theory and Practice by C. Glenn Walters, 2nd edition (Homewood, Illinois: Richard Irwin Publishers), 1974, page 12.

The state of the art in consumer education is severely disappointing. The potential of the subject, however, makes an assessment of developments to date the desirable and necessary beginning point for action by students, consumers, government, education and other individuals and institutions.

Consumer Education:
The Potential

> "Our real problems are also concealed from us by our remarkable prosperity which results in part from our new way of getting rich, which is to buy things from one another that we do not want at prices we cannot pay on terms we cannot meet because of advertising we do not believe."
>
> -- Robert M. Hutchins

The advent of the educated consumer would result in changes in the economy and society at large. The world desired by the educated consumer and the role that consumer could play in such a world are concepts in need of definition. The resulting changes in society should be the stuff of the ultimate dreams and goals of farsighted consumer educators.

Education has brought about changes in people, their social environment, and the earth on which they all live. Science and technology, for example, depend on the continuing process of education that transmits the findings of one generation along to the next for use and further development. The growth and evolution of the arts and humanities likewise depend in part on educational systems. The political lives of citizens, their social behavior, and the processes of buying, selling, and consumption on which their life styles depend are influenced by education.

The consequences of education are radical. Education succeeds when it causes change. Consumer education, largely underdeveloped, can also produce change -- it too will be radical.

The educated consumer will act differently. Among the appropriate actions and changed behaviors might be some of the following small scale examples. Each example in and of itself is perhaps remarkable for its mundane surface appearance. Yet the implications are enormous for the marketplace in which each takes place, for the personal value change each action represents, and, not insignificantly, for the direct improvements that will result for many individuals and humankind as a result of multiplied millions of instances of such changes.

If these ten acts correctly anticipate the future behavior of large numbers of consumers, the following implications may be anticipated for the marketplace and for consumer welfare.

Action #1

The educated consumer will ignore the claims of sellers of branded pain relievers and pay 75% less for unbranded aspirin with its nearly identical efficacy.

A. Implications for the Marketplace

The volume of sales for the "cold relief" industry will drop dramatically. Advertising, now accounting for as much as 25% of sales, will drop to practically nothing. Many well-known brands of cold remedies will disappear from the marketplace.

B. Implications for Consumer Welfare

Consumers will not waste time sorting through largely meaningless claims for identical products. They will save hundreds of millions of dollars which can be spent on products which offer more real benefits than the falsely perceived benefits of fancy pain relievers.

C. Implications for Consumer Behavior and Values

Consumers will be skeptical of claims other than those pertinent to the medication. They will seek only valid claims as to the efficacy of pain relievers and ignore or seriously doubt representations such as the importance of the color of the capsule, the fact of multiple ingredients, the fact that pregnant women tested them, and other irrelevant or trivial information.

Action #2

The educated consumer will calculate the operating costs of a large new car at 25¢ to 30¢ per mile and take the bus (if public transportation exists), bicycle, or walk.

A. Implications for the Marketplace

Few large cars will be sold. The auto industry will decline and workers will seek other employment in industries such as mass transit. Less of the nation's natural resources such as oil, steel, and aluminum will be used up by the transportation sector of the economy. Retail and service businesses will relocate to suit the new transportation patterns.

B. Implications for Consumer Welfare

Enormous cost savings will be accompanied by changes in life style brought on originally by mass use of the relatively inexpensive automobile. More people will work and locate their homes nearer mass transit facilities. Recreation and travel will change to suit the new transportation patterns. Households and families might be together at home more often instead of driving each other to destinations all over the countryside.

C. Implications for Consumer Behavior and Values

The changed behavioral patterns induced by new transportation modes are potentially enormous. Mobility is part of the American dream, and improved low cost mass transit systems could in fact provide more mobility locally as well as interstate and internationally for larger numbers of people. The benefits to the poor or those physically unable to drive private autos will be important because they often have no practical alternative to public transportation.

Action #3

The educated consumer will adjust the household thermostat and cut space heating and cooling costs by as much as 40% at little sacrifice in comfort and none in health.

A. Implications for the Marketplace

The domestic energy industries are strained to capacity and more serious political and economic consequences lurk ahead. Consumers who conserve with thermostats will save money, reduce the need for costly crash energy development by government and industry, and may even make possible the diversion of enormous sums of investment into other non-energy national priorities. Demand for energy-efficient architecture and construction materials will create new industrial growth.

B. Implications for Consumer Welfare

Space heating and cooling is a comfort question. Varying degrees of discomfort are experienced in the same temperatures by different people. The environmental improvements caused by less coal, oil, nuclear, and other energy production will affect everyone through visibly cleaner air and water as well as reduced health and safety costs.

C. Implications for Consumer Behavior and Values

People will be less oriented to creature comforts. They will spend less time in totally manmade, controlled temperature environments. People might discover the outdoors again. They may seek more energy-efficient housing as an alternative way of reducing energy used for space heating and air conditioning.

Action #4

The educated consumer will mix detergent and amonia in water and avoid paying three times as much for ineffective "super strength" cleansers.

A. Implications for the Marketplace

People will pay less attention to extravagant advertising claims for ordinary products such as cleansers. Advertising may decline or change in nature to bring out new uses of cheaper basic household products, such as amonia, soap, bleach, detergent, or baking soda.

B. Implications for Consumer Welfare

Much money will be saved if a lot of special purpose household products are not purchased. The sink, pots and pans, and the floor will be just as clean at the lower price.

C. Implications for Consumer Behavior and Values

Consumers who stop buying such products will be less reliant on advertising claims of extra strength cleansers and will be more inclined to verify the sellers' puffery. These consumers will be less likely to waste their attention on mindless promotion and will be less concerned with the insignificant minor traumas associated by advertisers with the techniques of household cleaning and maintenance.

Action #5

The educated consumer will not borrow money at a 30% annual percentage rate from a small loan company.

A. Implications for the Marketplace

Efficient lenders will prosper and many high cost lenders will go out of business as consumers stop borrowing needlessly or start taking their business elsewhere.

Competition on interest rates and the terms of loan contracts will be sharpened to entice knowledgeable potential borrowers.

B. Implications for Consumer Welfare

Consumers, especially those eligible for credit, but with moderate incomes, will borrow less or borrow on better contract terms. Such households will get into fewer financially embarrassing situations because of debt and they will not be burdened with excessive interest costs.

C. Implications for Consumer Behavior and Values

Affected consumers will be more aware of the serious implications of debt. Such persons will be less inclined to spend their future incomes for immediate gratifications. A shift in attitudes toward the slogan of buy now and pay later will occur. Consumers will live more within their means due to lower cost debt or just due to the fact of less debt.

Action #6

The educated consumer will insist that his government prosecute an auto repair shop that replaced a battery when it should have merely cleaned a battery cable.

A. Implications for the Marketplace

Reduced incompetence and fraud in the auto repair industry will drive marginal quality firms, incompetent workmen, and deceitful practitioners out of the field. Progressive and competent repairers will prosper even though the overall market for repairs will shrink for lack of "victims." New cars will decline as consumers discover the improved economics of keeping cars repaired for a longer period of time before trading or junking them.

B. Implications for Consumer Welfare

Consumers will save many dollars as a result of improved law enforcement that stops a practice that probably victimizes many car owners. Consumers who are aware of their needs for repair and seek services with some knowledge of their real problems will get better results by saving money and exposing incompetent service.

C. Implications for Consumer Behavior and Values

Self reliant buyers of repair services will shop with confidence and avoid the problems of automobiles that can't perform. They will maintain their cars better and get better performance at lower costs in terms of their time, money and emotional well-being. Consumers who get results will restore their faith in government's ability to provide protection that affects them personally.

Action #7

The educated consumer will deposit savings in his credit union instead of leaving the money idle in his bank checking account.

A. Implications for the Marketplace

Competition will be keen as institutions vie for deposits with better rates and services. Financial institutions will no longer be subsidized by the aggregated billions of idle dollars from millions of ignorant depositors.

B. Implications for Consumer Welfare

Consumers will receive income for their savings rather than suffer opportunity losses for their lack of knowledge of savings instruments.

C. Implications for Consumer Behavior and Values

Consumers will be more inclined to save when they recognize the income they can derive from intelligent savings practices.

Action #8

The educated consumer will read a publication of a consumer research organization before choosing an air conditioner.

A. Implications for the Marketplace

Consumers will buy more objectively and with more valid and complete information than is normally available through advertising, personal selling, and promotional efforts. The objective and well-informed seller will be able to sell to this buyer if his information is perceived as valid and complete. Price will be a more significant factor as sellers find puffery, noise, carnival atmosphere, and high pressure less effective sales tools. Preferred products will be chosen by consumers before they approach retailers who will compete on price and real services.

B. Implications for Consumer Welfare

Consumers will save by reducing the sums of electric consumption, repairs and maintenance, and original investment costs that often affect them significantly in a seasonal pattern. Consumers may be able to obtain more comfort at reduced costs. They may decide not to buy an air conditioner if they have limited means to pay the full costs of ownership and operation.

C. Implications for Consumer Behavior and Values

Consumers will take the use of air conditioning seriously if they understand it as more than merely the purchase of the lowest cost original equipment. They may not rank air conditioning as such a high priority when its claims on income are fully understood.

Action #9

The educated consumer will report the fact that all major brands of bread in all local stores are priced identically to the anti-trust division of his state Attorney General's office and expect the Attorney General to do something to correct the situation, too!

A. Implications for the Marketplace

Competition will be more price-oriented if consumers become sensitive to the apparent anti-trust implications of identical retail prices. The weaker, less efficient firms who survive only under high price umbrellas will go out of business. Cost efficiency will be a significant competitive factor. Promotion, often the primary form of non-price competition, will be a less important activity.

B. Implications for Consumer Welfare

The price of a basic food product will go down. Price competition may produce occasional sale prices and more frequent bargains for price-conscious shoppers.

C. Implications for Consumer Behavior and Values

Only a sophisticated buyer recognizes price fixing patterns and knows enough about law to complain effectively about them. Such awareness among consumers implies a high degree of confidence and an ability to cope with many of the complex issues facing consumers in the marketplace.

Action #10

The educated consumer will ask for proof from his agent that an offered life insurance policy is the lowest cost one available of that type offered by reliable companies.

A. Implications for the Marketplace

Price competition will be a new ingredient in life insurance sales, one of the most important, largest, and most mysterious of all commonplace purchases. Policies will be revised, pricing will be a more important factor in competition, and much of the folklore of the insurance agent will pass into oblivion.

B. Implications for Consumer Welfare

Price savings will amount to as much as 30% of annual premiums -- premiums that are paid for years by consumers unaware of overcharges of as much as several hundred dollars per year. Consumers aware of price likely will buy more needed life insurance protection with these savings.

C. Implications for Consumer Behavior and Values

Consumers who understand life insurance pricing will understand more of the real costs for the various types of benefits in the many forms of life insurance policies. They will buy with confidence better insurance programs to fit their individual needs for unexpected death, disabilities, savings needs, and retirement purposes over the life cycle. Life insurance planning is one of the complex decision areas few households are able to cope with satisfactorily.

Many of the above examples can be questioned in their detail. The implications of change might not turn out to be as suggested. Nonetheless, the message is clear. Consumer education can produce change; the changes can be far reaching for consumers and business. In view of the apparent wholesome benefits to individuals, families, the economy, and society at large, consumer education can be seen as a major potential tool of social and economic progress.

Consumer education can produce substantive change. Persons who advocate and evaluate its importance should not lose sight of their greater long term goals while they are embroiled in the continued short run crises of their programs and institutions.

Roadblocks

"While over 1,200 students watched, 20 teachers paraded down the aisle of Abraham Lincoln High School in San Jose, California, a few months ago. The teachers were pedaling tricycles, pushing scooters and towing their 61-year-old principal in a child's wagon. They were trying to whip up student enthusiasm for a magazine subscription drive sponsored by the school and Curtis Publishing Co."

-- Wall Street Journal

"Persons who have been used to a petty, huckstering way of life, cannot enlarge their apprehensions to a nation of anything better."

-- William Hazlitt
(1778-1830)

The promises of consumer education, as reviewed, only increase the disappointment in the achievements in the field to date.

No definitive study has been produced that provides the ultimate measure of consumer education: the ability of people to cope with their choices as consumers in order to produce the maximum possible fulfillment of their needs and/or wants. As a consequence, only indirect and partial measurements provide indications of the status of the education of American consumers. Better consumer education indicators will be needed to shape the direction of future programming.

The following partial indicators provide a consistent if only a rough sketch of the state of the art in the field.

1. National consumer advocate organizations have not mounted a significant campaign or effort to create or implement federal consumer education legislation, to urge creation of state programs, or to produce even a major study of the subject, though they are now actively supporting legislation for an Agency for Consumer Protection.

2. Before 1968, no state had a statewide consumer education requirement in its public schools. Today only a few states have mandated programs and have operating requirements in place.

3. No professional education organization exists to promote consumer interests on a national scale. The only state organization of this type is the Illinois Consumer Education Association created in early 1974.

4. Congress recently has passed three pieces of legislation with significant consumer education components:

   a) Part F, Vocational Education Amendments of 1968 ("Consumer and Homemaking Education")

   b) Section 505, P.L. 92-318, the Education Amendments of 1972 ("Consumers' Education")

   c) Section 407, P.L. 93-380, the Education Amendments of 1974 ("Consumers' Education")

   The Part F funding primarily benefits traditional home economics programs, but it has helped consumer education in some states. Public Law 92-318 was never funded by Congress and funds were never requested in Presidential budgets. Although P.L. 93-380 was passed in 1974, there was no appropriation until FY 1976. The initial appropriation was $3.1 million.

5. Advertising expenditures represent a source of consumer education/information that is prepared, controlled, and delivered by seller interests. Personal selling, packaging, product publicity, and special promotions combined with advertising represent a seller-directed promotional expenditure of over $100 billion in the U.S. economy. Consumer-directed information, on the other hand, is not significantly institutionalized and consists of the output of small consumer research organizations, the information campaigns of a few public agencies, and a share of mass media produced editorial material. The combined national expenditure, in-kind as well as direct, for consumer-directed information represents perhaps 10% of the amount of promotional expenditures.

6. Consumer affairs as a vocation, an avocation, an essential skills area for general students, or as a subject for teacher preparation is virtually non-existent in higher education, the place where significant innovations often arise within the total formal education system.

7. It wasn't until 1975 that the U.S. Office of Education appointed a person to a permanent consumer education position.

8. The core of trained professionals in the consumer education field is so small that impact cannot be readily identified.

9. A common concept of consumer education's basic thrust does not exist. Some persons view it primarily as buymanship information or various tactics for buyers to use in choosing brands, products, and services. Some view it as an instrument for reforming business practices, particularly in reducing consumer fraud and deceptive practices. Some view it as a way to save money without changing basic consumer decision patterns. Some view it as a tool to arouse citizen action in reforming the business system, the marketplace, and government's role in business transactions. Some view it as a means toward major social change. Some view it as much ado about nothing.

10. Some would challenge the idea that traditional institutions should conduct an activist oriented consumer education program. Some view it as exclusively a matter for the public schools, particularly at the secondary level. Others view it synonymously with the formal education system, K-Adult. Some see it as a public information effort utilizing the mass media and special materials to disseminate concepts and particular data relevant to immediate consumer decisions. Some see it as a limited business function.

11. While there is no particular firm, substantive opposition to the development of consumer education in any of the perceived forms mentioned, there is simply no major element, institution, profession, or group of persons contributing notably to the demand for consumer education in the U.S.

Consumer education has problems ahead. It does not have major institutional allies. It is not defined well enough to nurture common understandings among persons who might jointly support it.

Consumer education does not have the characteristics of a subject that is about to be rapidly institutionalized. Until there is consumer support as well as interest among professionals, consumer education will progress slowly in any of the possible forms it may take.

Perspectives on the Content of Consumer Education

Things are in the saddle
And ride mankind.

-- Ralph Waldo Emerson

Consumer education is partial preparation for and guidance in the art of living. Many persons have reflected on this general view, but the subject needs more conceptual thinking before it is fully understood for purposes of widespread adoption and implementation.

The following letter to a high school principal may say more than all of the precise and fancy attempts to describe the purpose of consumer education:

> I want to know why you and your teachers did not tell and teach about life and the hard, critically practical world...
>
> I am a husband and a father working blindly from a high school intellectual to a respectable self-supporting voting citizen of the community. In this transition I am beginning to get an upper hand on the lower rung of the ladder of life for which education never prepared me a whit.
>
> I wish I had been taught more about family relationships, child care, getting along with people, interpreting the news, paying off a small mortgage, household mechanics, politics, local government, the chemistry of food, carpentry, how to budget and live within the budget, the value of insurance, how to figure interest when borrowing money and paying it back in small installments, how to enjoy opera over the radio, how to detect shoddy goods, how to distinguish a political demagog from a statesman, how to grow a garden, how to paint a house, how to get a job, how to be thrifty, how to resist high-pressure salesmanship, how to buy economically and intelligently, and the danger of installment buying.*

*The Bulletin of the National Association of Secondary School Principals (National Education Association, Washington, D.C.), October, 1960, pp. 153-154.

Attempting to assist the individual in obtaining "an upper hand on the lower rung of the ladder of life" begins with value choices. While the option exists to inculcate values into students, the majority view opposes directly teaching values. This view is expressed by Ray Page in the Superintendents' foreword to the 1968 Guidelines for Consumer Education published by the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, Illinois:

> Individuals must make choices in the many areas of daily life. Poor decision-making on the part of children and adults, both as individuals and in groups is readily observable. Choices involve not only basic economic factors but also factors of a social, political, esthetic, and moral nature. Frequently, choices need to be made on the basis of value judgments.
>
> Consumer education is not intended to direct consumer choices. It does provide awareness of alternatives and opportunities and assists the consumer in making the choice which is best for his purposes in light of his values. Nor is it the purpose of Consumer Education to indoctrinate values. Consumer Education should provide the experiences that enable students to engage in the process of weighing the evidence necessary to arrive at an intelligent decision. In this process, there will be numerous opportunities to consider what it means to make a life as well as to make a living. The need for Consumer Education in today's educational program is evident.
>
> It is important that we make every effort to relate education to the realities of the student's daily life. If traditional programs do not adequately prepare our youth for living in today's and tomorrow's world, then we must be willing to break with tradition and make the necessary changes so that education will be relevant to student needs.
>
> If curriculum organization is designed to focus attention upon essentials, it may well be claimed that Consumer Education deserves to be one of the integrating centers, not relegated to a subordinate position on the periphery of the educational program.

While adhering to these views on values, David Schoenfeld goes further to identify three elements as considerations that in turn suggest that consumer education is an extraordinarily rich and comprehensive subject area:

Consumer education deals generally with the role of the individual as a consumer in the society. The instructor must comprehend the complexity of the individual's consumer role and his motivations which stem from a variety of concerns and interests. There are several basic influences on consumer behavior. One is an economic consideration, which is really the availability of money or credit to the individual. A second is psychological, which involves subjective preferences, status and prestige, peer group recommendations, taste, quality, fashion, etc. The third consideration is sociological. Patterns of behavior are in many ways a reflection of one's environment, one's family, customs, and mores, which are translated into market activities. The blend of these three considerations is not the same for all individuals. The development of the educated consumer permits that person to determine his personal priorities and to recognize the rationale for that priority based on the weighting of these three elements. The consumer education instructor should be certain to give emphasis to all three considerations.

Consumer education deals with an area that concerns itself with attitudes and behavioral patterns which reflect difficult value structures. It is critical, therefore, that the program be valid and objective in terms of the inclusion of all points of view without the imposition of one particular set of values. Respect for the individuality of values is essential, and unless this is permitted to remain intact, little or nothing can be done to give assistance to those who need it. Hopefully, consumer attitudes and behavior may gradually be altered as a result of consumer education, but the process is highly individual and private. The instructor should never attempt to superimpose his value judgments on others.

Let us make it clearly understood that the objective of consumer education is not the direction of consumer choices. Rather, it is to expose to the individual all of the alternatives and opportunities that are available to him and thus enable him to make a more rational choice, which is predicated on his individual needs.

Let me conclude by stating my definition of consumer education. It is the preparation of the individual in the skills, concepts, and understandings that are required for everyday living to achieve, within the framework of his own values, maximum satisfaction and utilization of his resources.* (Editor's underscoring.)

---

*David Schoenfeld, "Consumer Education: An Overview," in Consumer Education: Using the Full Team (Albany, New York: State Education Department), 1968, pp. 506.

The economic-psychological-sociological approach recognizes the need to blend many factors in the circumstances of an individual or household. This concept might be viewed as an interdisciplinary approach to the subject: interdisciplinary in the sense that tools and concepts of many academic fields are necessary to the task.

The importance of the relevant interdisciplinary fields is remarkably varied and can be described by the following chart:

Table I

Interdisciplinary Analysis of Consumer Education Content*

	Academic Field's Importance to Study of		
Academic Field	Consumer Decision Making Processes	Consumer Environment	Consumer Value Systems
Anthropology	3	2	2
Biological Sciences	2	3	3
Business Education	1	2	3
Business Management	2	2	3
Consumer Economics	1	1	2
Economics	1	1	2
English Literature	3	2	2
Fine Arts	3	3	2
Health (Phys. Ed.)	2	2	3
Home Economics	1	1	2
Journalism	2	2	3
Languages	3	3	2
Law	2	1	2
Marketing/Sales	1	1	3
Mathematics	2	3	3
Nutrition	2	3	3
Personal Finance	1	1	3
Philosophy/Logic/ Religion	2	3	1
Political Science	2	1	2
Psychology	1	3	2
Science (Physical)	3	2	3
Social Studies	2	1	2
Social Welfare	2	2	3
Sociology	2	1	2
Speech	2	3	3

1=very important
2=moderate importance
3=little or no importance

*Author's evaluation

Table I shows the relative importance of academic fields as preparation for the study of the consumer in general. It is not specific to the type or level of education. It also shows the academic fields from which the greatest contributions to consumer education can be expected.

Those fields which offer the most assistance to the understanding of consumer decision-making processes are business education, consumer economics, economics, home economics (and its many subfields, such as family economics or home management), marketing, personal finance (actually not a discipline but a common term used for courses that emphasize family and household finance, budgeting, credit, savings, trust, investments, etc.), and psychology.* The consumer environment includes the physical, social, legal, ecological, and economic. Therefore studies in consumer economics, economics, home economics, law, marketing, personal finance, political science, social studies and sociology would be most related.** Values and related ethical and moral issues are studied primarily in conjunction with philosophy and religion.

Figure I indicates the flow of knowledge into and out of the field of consumer education. The field itself borrows from the many basic and applied disciplines of Table I, but it too can be useful in aiding understanding of the disciplines from which it borrows. As a field of applied studies, consumer education offers opportunities for practical use of the more conceptual content of other fields. For example, calculation of compounded percentage increases in a mathematics course takes on added meaning when it is applied to the growth of $100 in a bank savings deposit account held for 10 years at 5% interest. $162.89 in money terms is immediately recognizable whereas a factor of 1.6289 is purely conceptual. Teachers of conceptual subjects or tool courses realize the value of using examples from the students' experiences. Such teachers can be more effective if they have an appreciation for students' real consumer problems and experiences.

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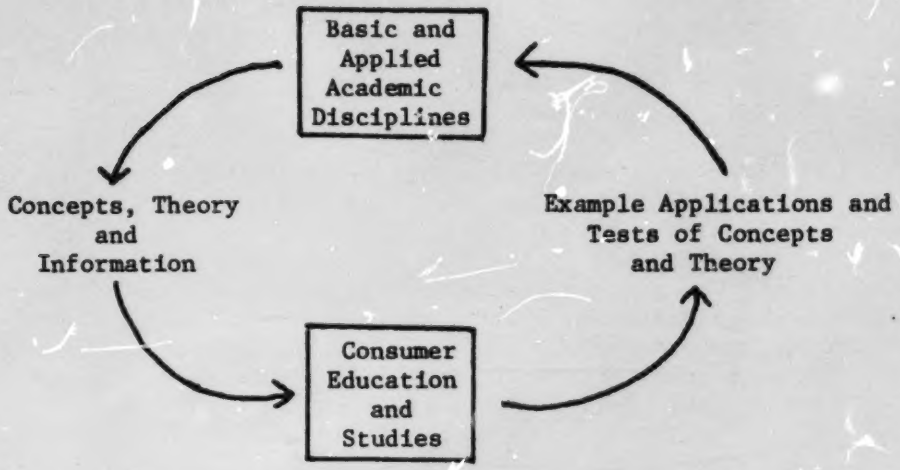
*Milton L. Blum, Psychology and Consumer Affairs, New York: Harper & Row, 1977, is a recent major attempt to demonstrate the relationships of the two fields.

**A unique comparative multi-disciplinary approach to consumer information in several countries is found in Hans B. Thorelli, Helmut Becker, and Jack Engledow, The Information Seekers, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Ballinger Publishing Company, 1975.

Figure 1

The Interfaces of Consumer
Education with Other Disciplines


Basic and Applied Academic Disciplines
Concepts, Theory and Information
Example Applications and Tests of Concepts and Theory
Consumer Education and Studies

Additional examples abound of the possible applications of various concepts from many disciplines in consumer education.* These could include:

1. The role of government in affecting the types of product labels on the market;

2. The philosophical question of whether individuals should be forced to buckle up their seat belts or allowed to endanger their lives and health;

3. The connotations of words used in advertisements;**

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*The value of consumer education materials in other study fields has been well described in the occasional papers of the New Jersey Center for Consumer Education Services. See, for example, "Consumer Education: An Interdisciplinary Approach," by William L. Johnston, 1971.

**See the incisive logic of Ivan L. Preston on the misuse of advertising and selling language in The Great American Blow-Up, University of Wisconsin, Madison, 1975.

4. The disadvantages of low income in satisfying the basic needs of a family;

5. The calculation of unit price values of various sellers of similar products;

6. The effect of poor money management practices in producing stress in marriages;

7. The process of household decision-making in the purchase of a car of home;

8. The differences in the budgets of households in rural and urban areas and the resulting differences in their life styles.

One of the most comprehensive and recent studies of consumer education was developed under a grant from the U.S. Office of Education to Consumers Union, a consumer research organization. The Consumer Education Materials Project produced six books* built around a specific concept of consumer education.

The Consumer Education Materials Project used a well considered explanation of consumer education that builds on the perspectives referred to earlier:

What is Consumer Education?

> Consumer education means different things to different people. The President's Committee on Consumer Interests in 1968 defined consumer education as "the preparation of the individual in the skills, concepts and understandings required for everyday living to achieve within the framework of his own values, maximum utilization of and satisfaction from his resources.
>
> That's a broad definition -- broad enough to encompass the many consumer education programs described in these books. Consumer education is not a science or a discipline in the traditional sense, or a list of rational principles that,

*The six are Early Childhood Consumer Education, Elementary Level Consumer Education, Secondary Level Consumer Education, Consumer Education in Junior and Community Colleges, Postsecondary Vocational and Technical Institutes, Preparing the Consumer Educator, and Adult Consumer Education in the Community published by Consumers Union of the United States, Mount Vernon, N.Y., in 1972 and 1973.

once learned, will ensure the wisdom of consumer choices from then on. Rather, it is a continuing process of learning that begins at the preschool level and lasts a lifetime. It emphasizes the importance of personal decision-making, helping the individual analyze available alternatives and weigh the short-rante and long-range consequences of his marketplace choices for himself and for society.

Consumer education is most effective when each student can relate it to his needs, his goals, and his social concerns. At every level, consumer education undergoes changes in response to changes in the student's consumer role. For some, it is part of general education stressing consumer competence. For others, it takes on the additional dimension of professional preparation.

Since consumer education concerns itself with attitudes and behavior patterns reflecting different value structures, the teacher must approach his subject as objectively as possible. A program that merely defends business or government from its critics or, alternatively, that merely condemns the economic and political system for its malfunctioning parts, does not help individuals make their own choices. A student's attitudes, behavior, and values may change as a result of consumer education; but changes should evolve from the educational process, not be dictated by it.

Without the support of educational programs, many efforts on behalf of consumers will have only limited effect. Where marketplace reforms are needed, the need must be explained. Consumer-oriented legislation may often be necessary. But the usefulness of any legislation is limited unless educated, enlightened consumers learn about it and take advantage of its provisions.

Not all will agree with the perspectives developed to this point. Some would emphasize such things as free enterprise and profit under the implied theory that consumer education is learning how to appreciate the world of business. This view is expressed by Leone Ann Heuer:

It seemed necessary to begin this paper on "Business and Consumer Education" with the mention of profit, since there are people who have jaundiced attitude toward profit in business. Profit is probably the least understood of all the characteristics of the free enterprise system. Yet, profits perform many important functions that benefit all of us in some way. One of these functions is consumer education.*

*Leone Ann Heuer, "Business and Consumer Education," Illinois Journal of Education, October, 1969, page 11.

Some would disagree that consumer education can be performed for profit -- ot they would disagree that it should. Apparently expressing the fears of many, the Office of Consumer Affairs of the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare speaks of "biased, narrow-interest of self serving materials" and uses the illustration of a business-sponsored resource material to underscore the conflict of interest between business and consumer interests:

> A teacher should develop his own evaluative process for resource materials. He should not only evaluate the content of what he receives but be alert to important omissions. For example, in a business-sponsored resource material on consumer credit, the teacher should check to see if all vital points are discussed objectively and adequately, such as the different sources of credit; the actual credit rates and the differences in rates by sources; the dollar cost of credit; the cost of credit life insurance; the potential pitfalls of overextending one's use of credit; the problems of the holder-in-due-course; the potential problems in consolidation of debts; the implications of the confession of judgment; and the problems of wage garnishment and bankruptcy. A resource material on consumer credit would be incomplete if any major points are omitted.*

Lillian H. Mohr has prepared an extensive proposal for a private foundation with business support. It would attempt to avoid the conflict of interest problems of commercial sponsorship through diffused control of its policies and a budget of $679,000 in the first year. Educators nominated by government would have a major role in its formation.**

There are, of course, persons who will insist that consumer education take sides with various institutions and against others. The consumer movement, government, and business are three major

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*U.S. Office of Consumer Affairs, Suggested Guidelines for Consumer Education, grades K-12, 1970, page 43.

**Lillian H. Mohr, A National Foundation for Consumer Education, Office of Consumer Affairs, Washington, D.C., 1977. An interesting parellel may be found in the Sloan Foundation's grant of $250,000 to Stephen's College, Columbia, Missouri, that established the Institute for Consumer Education and its annual conferences through 1941. See Lucy Black Creighton, Pretenders to the Throne, Lexington, Massachusetts: Lexington Books, 1976, page 75.

institutions affecting the welfare of consumers and there is no consensus on just how their roles should be defined. Controversy is inevitable among professionals interested in consumer education, many of whom are affiliated with one or more of these three institutions. Additional perspectives on consumer education can be gained from further examination of the literature of these institutions.

Educators in the consumer field today are drawn almost exclusively from backgrounds or other specializations besides consumer education, per se. They often argue that their base discipline should gain greater control or influence over the consumer education process and subject matter. This conflict among educators is a serious one and is examined further in another section of this report.

Finally, it is necessary to reflect that consumer education cannot right all of the problems of the marketplace. Sometimes consumers will act against their own apparent interests in the face of their education, their attitudes, and what at least appears to be common sense.

> A majority of the families interviewed were aware to some degree of their plight in the marketplace. Three out of five said that they thought buying on credit was a bad idea. Three-quarters of all the families sampled used credit.*

What are the limits of consumer education? The tests are yet to be made in this fledgling field.

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*Esther Peterson, writing in the Introduction to David Capolvitz, The Poor Pay More, (New York: Free Press), 1967.

A Brief History

"Consumer exploitation has to a large extent replaced labor exploitation as the real problem of our times."

-- Sidney Margolius

While we can argue the urgency of implementing consumer education nationwide at all levels, the urgent plea is not a new one. The following milestones indicate considerable interest in the subject for a half century. The roots of consumer education are found in the consumer movement which has been stirring for an even longer period.

Roots of Consumer Protection

King John of England proclaimed in 1202 A.D.:

> If any default be found in the bread of a baker of this city, the first time let him be drawn upon a hurdle, from the Guild Hall to his own house, and the false loaf hanging from his neck; if a second time, he shall be found committing the same offense, he shall be placed in a pillory, and there remain at least an hour.

Wherever market systems and specialization of labor have developed, the buying and selling functions have been performed. As the buyer and seller interests are not the same, the buyer has always had to be prepared -- to be competent. One of the ways of improving consumer competence is through information and education related to the product or service, the financing, the delivery and installation of a product, the care and maintenance of products, the validity of seller claims, and so forth. The existence of this need for information and conceptual frameworks for buyer decision-making did not, however, instantly produce a field of study known as consumer education.

One of the first areas of consumer activity in the U.S. dealt with food. Much mass media attention was given the Poison Squads of Dr. Harvey W. Wiley, the U.S.D.A. chemist. Dr. Wiley exposed the adulteration of foods in highly publicized analyses of common food products. His efforts, plus followup muckraking journalism, led to the passage of the Pure Food and Drug Act of 1906.*

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*Doris Faber, History of the Consumer Movement: Enough. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux), 1972, Chapter 2.

Roots of Consumer Information and Education

The literature of the consumer movement began to develop in conjunction with consumer activism. That literature was sensational and unscientific, perhaps, but it contained the kernels of truth and generated a social discomfort that led to the development of more scholarly inquiry and scientific research. The process continues today.

The notable developments of the 1920's included both scholarly works and consumer research endeavors. The scholarly writings included those of Benjamin Andrews (The Economics of the Household, 1923) and Hazel Kyrk (A Theory of Consumption). These efforts rested heavily upon traditional economic theory. Most importantly, in 1924 Henry Harap published the classic, Education of Consumers. Mr. Harap, an advocate in his field perhaps longer than anyone else, engaged in a lively professional correspondence from his Washington, D.C. home for more than a half century after publishing his book. He placed his imprint on the consumer education tradition.

The other development that has provided so much material to consumer educators was the founding of Consumers' Research in 1929. While Consumers' Research with its publication, Consumers' Research Magazine, has declined in significance, a splinter group, Consumers Union, founded in 1935 as a result of disputes regarding the role of labor in manufacture of products being evaluated, has become an important force in consumer affairs. Its publication, Consumer Reports, a publication having 2.25 million subscribers is an authoritative product evaluation publication. While it appeals to a mass audience, it is a basic tool of the consumer educator.

Much occurred in established academic disciplines in the 1920's and 1930's. Consumer economics, personal finance, business education, and home economics were recognized entities. Their literature is filled with instances of contributions to consumer education. Among the legacies of the 1930's are textbooks such as Economics for Consumers, now in its sixth edition, but first published in 1939 by Leland J. Gordon who is still a co-author with Stewart Munro Lee. Scholarly works on specialized subjects, such as history of the consumer movement (Persia Campbell's Consumer Representation in the New Deal, 1940) and the nature of consumerism (Kenneth Dameron's Lectures on the Consumer Movement: What It Is and What It Means, 1941) appeared immediately after the active period of the 1930's.

Developments: 1920 to 1950

In addition to Harap's efforts (1924), the following activities need only be briefly identified to demonstrate that consumer education continued its embryonic growth:

1. The National Congress of PTA's was involved in some activities to implement consumer education in the 1930's, especially, according to Joseph Gaer in Consumers All: The Problem of Consumer Protection, 1940.

2. The U.S.D.A.'s Bureau of Home Economics, established in 1924, was primarily concerned with rural life, but later produced some aids for consumers.

3. During the New Deal period, the Better Business Bureaus began significant consumer information work.

4. The women's organizations of the 1930's were the backbone of consumerism promoting the interests of consumer education as well as consumer information work.

5. The American Home Economics Association created a consumer interest committee in the 1920's and again in the 1930's. AHEA was founded in 1908.

6. Stephens College, Columbia, Missouri, had an Institute for Consumer Education from 1937 to the early 1940's.

7. Consumers Union was founded in 1935 (see above).

8. Muckraking books and associated journalism were prominent in the late 1920's and 1930's. Books included such titles as Your Money's Worth, 100,000,000 Guinea Pigs, and Chamber of Horrors. Eleanor Roosevelt, the President's wife, was a columnist and her concern with consumer issues such as food and drugs showed up in her widely read writings.

9. In early 1939, The Consumer Education Association was formed. Membership of 700 was attained and two national conferences of teachers were held.*

Many of these developments were in response to consumer needs in times of high unemployment and general widespread economic distress. These events, dependent on the larger economic picture, either faded out or were modified during World War II. For nearly two more decades after that war, there was relative quiet in consumer affairs.

The events in consumer economics illustrate the dilemma in consumer education generally:

Before World War II

"Three major trends were apparent in economic education on the high school level before World War II. The first, and perhaps the most pervasive, was the growth in consumer economic, which influenced not only the economic course but also courses in civics, problems of American democracy, home economics, and business subjects.

*Lucy Black Creighton, Pretenders to the Throne, Lexington, Massachusetts: Lexington Books, 1976, page 76. Creighton says 5-10% of U.S. high schools were offering consumer economics in 1941 and many more had special material in consumer education integrated into other courses. Enthusiasm ran high as Herbert A. Tonne in Consumer Education in the Schools (New York: Prentice-Hall), 1941, p. xiii, said, "the educational expansion of the past decade has witnessed no movement that has gained greater momentum than has consumer education."

The second trend, by no means universal, was the attempt to place economics in its social setting. Over the years, the field of high school economics has steadily been broadened to include related sociology, economic history, and political science. Howard C. Hill and Rexford G. Tugwell emphasized this approach in a popular high school text entitled Our Economic Society and Its Problems: A Study of American Levels of Living and How to Improve Them. In some instances, study of economics was combined with other social studies. This trend has continued in contemporary courses in problems of American democracy and is visible in present-day high school economics courses.

The third trend, closely related to putting economics in its social setting, was the attempt to make economics study more functional and more realistic by emphasizing problems which students encounter or are familiar with. This trend was responsible for the challenging end-of-chapter materials in texts (problems for further study, readings, things to do) which attempted to "involve" students. Learning activities were broadened to include audiovisual presentations, practical investigations, field trips, and the use of mass media, including radio.

Postwar Shift

After World War II, these trends were reversed. The heavy emphasis on consumer economics and the personal-problems approach in the one-semester high school course in economics came under heavy attack. The economics profession was "appalled" by the lack of attention given in the high school course to models, structure, and the analytical tools of the economist."*

One additional major event occurred in the six-year period from 1942-48. The Consumer Education Study of the National Association of Secondary School Principals, financed by the National Better Business Bureau, concentrated on deceptive practices and the exploitation of consumers as well as more generic educational issues. The times changed, however, and this program was ended.

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*Edward C. Prehn, "Varied Approaches to Consumer Economics," Bulletin of the National Association of Secondary Schools of Principals, October, 1976, pp. 35-36.

Developments Since 1950

The American Council on Consumer Interests was founded in 1953. This organization, primarily composed of academic consumer economists and home economists and with an interdisciplinary orientation toward the problems of consumers, continues today as the professional society of persons interested in consumer education, both from the perspective of substantive content and learning procedures or teaching methods.

The period from World War II through the 1950's was remarkably quiet for both consumerism and consumer education. One writer* summarizes the period from 1947 to 1967 by noting such facts as:

1. The only publicly visible national consumer organization of that time, the National Association of Consumers, could not afford an office. It virtually disappeared in 1955.

2. Between 1957 and 1967, 114 bills to create some sort of federal consumer advocate agency were introduced, 109 did not even get a committee hearing, and none passed.

3. The Consumer Advisory Council to the Council of Economic Advisors never had any of its recommendations adopted between 1947 and 1952. The Eisenhower administration simply ignored the Council.

Consumer education fared poorly in the absence of a national concern for consumer welfare. "Consumer economics is out of balance" in the high school curriculum, declared a May 1961 article in the American Economic Review by Paul R. Olson. Likewise, the National Task Force on Economic Education in the same year downplayed the importance of economics principles for household decision-making.**

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*Jeanine Gilmartin, An Historical Analysis of the National Consumer Movement, Georgetown University, Washington, D.C., 1970.

**National Task Force on Economic Education. Economic Education in the Schools. (New York: Committee for Economic Development), 1961.

From the nadir of activity of 1960, the consumer movement and interest in consumer education have again arisen. The literature is rich in both, and consumerism has become a household word. Leaders in consumerism such as Ralph Nader, Carol Tucker Foreman, or Esther Peterson are national figures. Consumer issues are among those of the highest visibility in the public arena.

Consumer education has not had the prominent attention shown the consumer movement itself, but there have been several important developments both in the literature and on the national and state education scenes. These events reflect a notable upturn in the affairs of the field, perhaps indicating that it will not again fall to the depths of 1945 to 1960. The primary basis for such a statement is that consumer education has become relatively more institutionalized than in the 1930's. Lest institutional changes be overemphasized, however, it should be noted that consumer education is still in a very early stage of growth relative to its potential.

Recent Landmark Developments

1965 Consumer Education in Lincoln High School, a case study was published by Consumers Union. It became a widely circulated document showing how a high school in Yonkers, New York, began consumer education with a course taught by David Schoenfeld, a social studies teacher, and before long it grew to school-wide activities touching virtually all students.

1966 Economics and the Consumer was published by the Joint Council on Economic Education. This study tied the need of consumers in their day-to-day roles to understanding principles of economics. The study represented something of a reversal of the decline of the individual-oriented content in consumer economics so prominent five years before.

1967 Summary of Federal Government Activities, 1964 to 1967, was published by the President's Committee on Consumer Interests (PCCI). This widely quoted pamphlet gave a special chapter to consumer education, but as its critics have since pointed out, it does not show much achievement in consumer education in the Federal Government.*

*Arthur E. Rowse, "The Government and Consumer Education" in Bulletin of the National Association of Secondary School Principals, October, 1967, page 74. Rowse does evidence the philosophical commitment at many levels.

U.S. Office of Education was reported to have begun activities in consumer education. Actions reported by the PCCI included conferences, an information committee on consumer education within U.S.O.E., and a publication on potential funding sources. Rowse, however, pointed out some of the shortcomings at U.S.O.E. in 1967.

> "But it may be some time before the Office of Education is in a position to provide much concrete help in his regard. At this writing, it still does not have a single full-time person following progress in consumer education, a subject that has fallen through the cracks in the corner of the huge agency relegated to home economics. Of all the summer workshops fostered by the Office of Education, including those on economics, none has more than mentioned consumer education. An informed query by the President's consumer office last year revealed that the Office of Education has no data on the extent of composition of courses that might be labeled consumer education, in whole or in part.**

1967 The Illinois General Assembly enacted a law requiring that public school pupils, grades 8 through 12, "shall be taught and be required to study courses which include instruction in the area of consumer education, including but not necessarily limited to installment purchasing, budgeting and comparison of prices." The act was significant because it was funded, it was unequivocal in its mandate to the Superintendent of Public Instruction, and it was the first such state action.

1968 Public Law 90-576 was passed with a program entitled 'Consumer and Homemaking Education." (Part F of the Vocational Education Amendments of 1968.) Within the fifty States and territories that received these funds, some innovative consumer education programs were developed.

1969 The President's Committee on Consumer Interests published "Consumer Education: What It Is and What It Is Not." This modest flyer represents little new philosophically but shows a growing commitment of PCCI to the subject.

1970 Hawaii's state legislature mandated consumer education and the State Department of Education requires each school to certify that every student recommended for a high school diploma has received minimum required instruction.

**Ibid.

1970 The President's Committee on Consumer Interests published a landmark booklet, Suggested Guidelines for Consumer Education, K-12, which achieved wide distribution (in excess of 50,000 by 1973). The booklet is probably still the best known single publication on the nature, content, and implementation of consumer education in the schools.

1970 Survey and Evaluation of Consumer Education Programs in the United States, Volumes I and II, by Joseph N. Uhl, was published by the U.S.O.E. and made available through the ERIC system. This monumental study has served as a valuable reference for those considering initiation of consumer education programs on a large scale and within traditional education systems.

1972 1973 The six volume study of seventy-two innovative consumer education programs throughout the nation was published by Consumers Union. While not extensively distributed due to cost ($15 per set), the Consumer Education Materials Project publications are far and away the authorative sources of information on actual operating consumer education programs. The rich diversity of the projects reported is testimony to the existence of innovative teachers, educators, and public information professionals throughout the nation's educational system from pre-school through community adult programs.

1972 Public Law 92-318, section 505, was enacted. This law mandated establishment of the position of "Director of Consumers' Education" and authorized spending of $80 million in three years (through June 30, 1975). Included in the amendment were provisions for grants and contracts to state and local education agencies, institutions of higher education, and other public and private non-profit organizations, agencies or institutions. Activities to be encouraged included: Curricula development, educational programs within traditional education agencies or local communities, inservice training, institutes, workshops, and evaluation. Funds were never appropriated and the position of Director of Consumers' Education was not established under this legislation.

1975 The President's budget for FY 1976 included the first request for federal funding of a consumer education program. The $3.135 million request represented slightly more than 20% of the Congressional authorization in the 1974 law. Sixty-six projects and 10 contracts were financed with these first funds.*

1975 A White House meeting with 80 selected educators, Federal Officials, consumer advocates, business public affairs representatives, public information specialists, and mass media representatives was convened. The Office of Consumer Affairs, HEW (formerly PCCI) arranged the conference which was significant for its high status in the Executive branch as a "Tuesday at the White House" meeting.

Summary: History

Interest and activity in consumer education is not a new phenomenon. It has been a subject of textbooks for fifty years and was quite widely discussed before World War II.

Consumer education flourishes in cycles that roughly parallel the national interest in consumer issues. While there are instances of consumer advocate interest in consumer education, consumer education also has a constituency of educators, public officials, and others. Consumer education activity has more than recovered from its post World War II inactivity and has gathered unparalleled momentum in the 1970's. While not listed in the above chronology, the numbers of people reached by consumer education have risen meteorically in the past decade. Measures are not available, but all of the indices below, if quantified, would bear out this contention.

1. The rise in numbers of textbooks in consumer education.

2. The entry of new firms into the business of consumer education materials production and publication.

3. The rise in the membership of the American Council on Consumer Interests to about 3000 in its 22nd year of existence (1975).

4. The volume of public information releases of the greatly increased numbers of state and local consumer offices (about 300 nationwide).

*Mary Beth Minden, Technical Report No. 1, Office of Consumers' Education, Washington, D.C., November 22, 1976.

1973 Consumer Education for Adults was published by the Office of Consumer Affairs (formerly President's Committee on Consumer Interests) as a sequel to its 1970 publication for K-12. This booklet emphasized community level programs as did one of the Consumers Union series also published at this time.

1973 Consumer Education in the States was published by the Education Commission of the States with U.S. Office of Education funding. The comprehensive survey of state programs also set forth a number of conclusions and recommendations for both the commission itself and state educational systems.

1973 Survey of Consumer Education Legislation, 1972, was produced by the Consumer Education Committee of the Consumer Federation of America (CFA). CFA, whose 180 member organizations represent 35 million people, is the largest national consumer advocate organization. This publication signifies a heretofore unmatched direct interest of a leading consumer advocate organization on the subject of consumer education. The survey itself was superceded very shortly by the next publication in this chronology.

1974 Public Law 93-380, Section 811, was passed. Entitled 'Consumers' Education Programs," section 811 parallels the Consumers' Education provisions of the 1972 Act, P.L. 92-318, section 505. It contains the following major provisions: or

1. Creation of an Office of Consumers' Education in the U.S. Office of Education.

2. Appointment of a Director of Consumers' Education by the Commissioner of Education.

3. Establishment of a contract and grant program in consumer education; the program was authorized at $15 million per year for FY 1976 - 1978.

In the same legislation (known as the Education Amendments of 1974) Section 811 was incorporated into the Special Projects Act, and it was under this legislation that the program was implemented.

5. The growth in the circulation of the largest consumer information publications to about two million each. These three are Consumers Report, Changing Times, and Everybody's Money.

6. The advent of consumer journalism with numbers of newspaper and magazines featuring action line columns and columnists on consumer problems. Broadcast media likewise have special features and even a few series of consumer-oriented programs.

7. The numbers of elective courses at the secondary level in public schools. These electives are taught primarily in home economics, business education, and vocational education programs. Participating teachers, however, may be from additional disciplines such as social studies.

8. The number of traditional courses in which consumer related concepts have been introduced. These range from applications of mathematics to interest rate questions through the selection of construction materials in industrial arts classes.

Consumer education has achieved a momentum of its own in 1975. While it has far to go to achieve goals such as "consumer competence," "informed consumers," or "intelligent consumers," there is a substantial basis for hope that consumer education is an idea whose time has come.

Survey of Institutional Roles and Potentials with Recommendations

"We are the ones who start and who power the economic driveshaft. To us it is basic that we are the main force in the world in changing people's ideas of what their standard of living should be."

-- Dan Seymour, former President, J. Walter Thompson Company (on advertising)

Introducing This Section

A vast number of players are in the wings of the consumer education stage. A number of the institutions are each reviewed separately in this section in three parts:

A. nature of the current role of the institution;

B. potential role of the institution or some new or replacement entity;

C. recommendations for action by the institution in the short and/or long run, as appropriate.

No complete model or even gross rubric is set forth for the consumer education system. Instead, consumer education, as defined in the beginning of this report, is viewed as the implicit long term goal toward which all institutions can make some degree of efficient contribution. Consumer education may take many specific forms and few of these can be assured now to be the more desirable goals for education. In its embryonic stage, perhaps on the verge of a take-off growth period, an eventual nationally adequate system of consumer education can best be envisioned as the result of many forces and influences yet to be fully developed and exerted.

The institutional framework is chosen over the functional for three reasons. First, the functions necessary to consumer education are now well-defined. They are also not performed by any existing specialized institutions interdependent on one another. The second reason is that institutions take actions -- functional activities are not the locus of decision-making change agents. If virtually any of the institutions discussed below acts in a positive manner, some progress will be made in behalf of educating consumers. The third reason for the focus is that individuals, professional or otherwise, often have many institutional affiliations with which they can identify. If they are not successful in one action program, they can work on another one in a different institution.

The Consumer Movement

The consumer movement's cyclical rises and falls were shown to parallel the stirrings in consumer education. Consumers Union, the research and publishing organization, has developed educational materials of immense value for their objectivity and pioneering coverage of new areas. The Consumer Federation of America, the national advocacy group, has published an evaluation of state consumer education legislation and has a generally quiet standing education committee. Ralph Nader is listed as "directing" a multimedia package of secondary level consumer education materials published by Random House, Inc. in April, 1975.

The current role of the movement is quite limited as an advocate of consumer education (lobbying in Congress and the states on education legislation has been minimal) and producer of educational materials (except Consumers Union).

The potential role of the consumer movement is primarily as leader of public support for implementation of educational programs for consumers. The limited resources of consumer organizations restrict program planning, execution, and production of materials. The consumer-orientation of these organizations makes their performance of these functions desirable from the point of view of the public interest.

The following recommendations for consumer advocate organizations are feasible and within the missions of most of them.

1. National organizations should make consumer education an action priority in order to increase the availability of Federal resources.

2. State and local organizations should parallel the national effort in order to implement operating programs at the community, school system (K-adult), and state levels. These groups will first need to obtain the expertise of teachers and others in various areas of education in order to make more pertinent recommendations in their advocacy activities with legislators, state departments of education, school boards, and school administrators.

3. Consumer organizatons should work in conjuction with professional education groups such as the American Council on Consumer Interests, the National Education Association, or others toward the development of separate educational associations such as the Illinois Consumer Education Association to enroll educators in the effort to advance programs nationally and in the states.

4. Consumer advocate groups should enlist students and potential students for consumer education in their efforts to represent such persons. The consumer movement's unique claim to credibility among all forces with interests in consumer affairs is that it is the collective voice of consumers. Not all groups proclaiming the consumer interest can be taken at face value, of course.

Business, Trade, and Professional Interests

Numerous business organizations, including the Better Business Bureaus, actively publish and disseminate consumer education literature. Their current role is primarily limited to information work with adults and limited assistance (speakers, materials) to the school system. Much of the material produced by these organizations is self-serving. There is no reason to expect any business or professional group to devote a large portion of its resources to efforts that do not clearly advance its special interests. Nonetheless, the quality of such materials is often superb, not only in style and editorial quality but also in content that will prove beneficial to the cause of assisting consumers.

Potentially, the resources of the business and professional groups that could be devoted to consumer education are immense. Still, these organizations collectively cannot fulfill the needs of a major national consumer education effort. The eventual roles of such groups should be to produce certain materials and to provide expertise.

Recommendations to business, trade, and professional interest are:

1. These groups should produce materials that are current and factual for educators instead of more basic introductory and conceptual material for students. This is a long term goal until others begin to produce the basic information for students and the general consumer public. Specialized groups are closer to innovations and new developments in their own fields, but they do not have the educational expertise or objectivity to translate this information into materials that fill the needs of consumers.

2. Materials produced by special interest organizations should undergo a certification process that indicates they are suitable for particular educational purposes. Business and professional interest will increase their long term effectiveness by seeking certification whether by the school systems or other appropriate persons or agencies. Otherwise, their materials will continue to be (rightfully) suspect and they will not benefit from authoritative expert feedback evaluations from a certifying process.

   The purpose of certification should be primarily to assist teachers, the media, and others who disseminate information to students and other consumers. It should not ban, endorse, censor, or prohibit use of materials. A materials clearinghouse could provide editorial evaluations to accomplish this objective.

3. Immediately, professional and business organizations should refrain from further publication of blatant promotional and rhetorical propaganda under the label of consumer information. Specifically, some electric utilities, petroleum companies, and financial institutions are guilty of disseminating such information in what passes for objective guides to buying and consuming.

State Legislatures and Associations of States

Many legislatures have passed resolutions calling for consumer education. Few have made specific mandates to their departments of education or have appropriated categorical funds for the purpose. Legislatures generally see their current roles as limited in the subject matter of public education.

Potentially, legislatures serve as the ultimate means of shaping the direction of public education in the states. Consumer education appears to be a major need of the general public and considerable impetus is needed to implement it. Legislatures are limited in their understanding of educational processes. State and local systems of public education have not demonstrated or initiated leadership in this area to date. A partnership of purpose is needed, but legislatures have the ultimate control.

Recommendations to legislatures are:

1. Mandate statewide consumer education. This would include a high school competency or course requirement and initiation of adult education projects in conjunction with local groups aware of specific community needs.

2. Appropriate funds necessary to any categorically mandated program.

3. Mandate full time staffing for consumer education for the state. Partial assignments alone to business education, vocational education, home economics, or other established specialties are administratively inadequate for an interdisciplinary subject.

4. Before mandating any program, base it on a survey of student and various population needs in the state. Such a study should be administered by education specialists but given overall direction by a citizens group. Also the state should utilize the experiences of other states in this survey.

5. State government and educational associations should develop model legislation for use by the states.

Congress

Congress mandated the creation of a consumer education office with a director in the U.S. Office of Education in 1974 and authorized funds for that purpose in FY 1976 and 1977.

Potentially, the Congress should see that adequate funds are authorized and appropriated to carry out the legislative mandate, evaluate its progress, reshape it as developments warrant, and extend its life for a period of time that will allow for long range planning, oversight by Congressional committees can serve a significant function if recent reluctance of administrative agencies to fully implement a public law is any indication. It is the Congress and not the administrative agencies that appropriate the funds to carry out Federal programs.

It is recommended that Congress maintain a close watch on the U.S.O.E. Consumers' Education program and hold specific hearings on the program prior to the finalization of the 1978 budget. At that time Congress must consider extending the program's legal authorization beyond the prescribed three-year period. Further, Congress should review the relationship of consumer's education (P.L. 93-380) to the older Consumer and Homemaking program, Part F of the vocational Education Act. Overlap of programs cannot be tolerated in view of the very limited resources devoted to consumers' education in U.S.O.E. Consumer education as a separate entity is in a critical, formative stage and should not be appended to the activities of a large, tradition, and firmly-established program.

U.S. Office of Education

The U.S. Office of Education is still developing its current role in consumers' education. It's first full time person devoted to the subject was appointed to initiate the planning effort which followed the enabling legislation of 1974 (P.L. 93-380). The Office of Consumers' Education now has five permanent staff members and two on temporary assignment.

Potentially, the U.S. Office of Education can add a great deal of impetus to consumer education through its grant and contract authority. Further, it can provide technical assistance in two forms: as a disseminator of research findings and experiences and as a source of funds for and information about innovative, developmental or pilot programs. Overall, U.S.O.E. should assume the role of a lead government agency in order to stimulate innovation, diffuse those innovations nationally, and encourage large scale adoption of consumer education programs in the states and locally. It should not (and does not) produce or approve materials, such as textbooks or curriculum guides. Neither should U.S.O.E. staff initiate or operate its own programs. Its function is to encourage consumer education activities and provide a focal point for consumer education interests In doing so, U.S.O.E. can make a major contribution to consumer welfare.

Recommendations for action in the near future are based on prospects for limited budgets:

1. Research programs should be initiated to determine the national needs for consumer education by directly measuring consumer competence and the human and economic cost of incompetence. Such inventory studies are the baseline for educational planning if education is viewed partially as an influence that enables persons to make better individual and social decisions toward their personal goals.

2. Examination should begin of the feasibility of materials clearinghouses to assist educators in identifying existing materials as well as to enable them to evaluate and obtain them. U.S.O.E. may then determine whether these centers (or a single center) are an appropriate federal function. The demonstrated usefulness of the New Jersey and Michigan consumer education materials centers are evidence of the possible need for more of them. Whether the states each need an individual center is open to question -- regional and/or local ones may be better.

3. In view of the many institutions potentially involved in consumer education, a portion of the funds for the Consumers' Education program should be devoted to evaluation or assessment projects. These should critically review ongoing programs with a view toward encouraging innovative ideas from individual leaders, teachers and community organizations, as well as school systems, the media, and national educational, professional, consumer, and business organizations.

4. Technical assistance efforts should be immediately instituted. This requires bringing expertise together and finding means of disseminating that knowledge. A series of conferences and field travel for staff will be necessary for this purpose which otherwise requires relatively little funding.

5. A national advisory committee should be instituted composed of a wide range of individuals able to direct the development of the consumers education program over time. The representatives should include persons from a variety of academic disciplines, types of involvement in community and school system programs, and consumer, business, and educational organizations, among others. The committee is necessary because of the lack of experience to date of U.S.O.E. personnel.

6. U.S.O.E. should urge coordination and appropriate actions for its many existing programs that have potential value for the purpose of educating consumers.

7. U.S.O.E. should lead, through its position as the primary federal education agency, in the development of programs in other agencies. Many agencies through their regulatory controls and operating programs have enormous potential in this regard.

8. U.S.O.E. should examine pre-service and inservice training programs, teacher education degree requirements and teacher training institutions to determine the highest priority areas for school system and higher education action. Pilot teacher training programs should be initiated based on this research. Model options for teacher education degree requirements should be the subject of a small national conference following the research.

Federal Agencies Besides U.S.O.E.

Many consumer information programs are conducted by Federal agencies. Much of this effort is sporadic in reaction to emergencies or current events. A great deal is producer-oriented (as opposed to consumer-oriented) as in the case of the U.S.D.A.'s Cooperative Extension Service. Much of the printed material receives only limited distribution. Duplication of effort among extension agencies has been enormous and much of the quality suffers. Where gaps in the literature are found, there is inadequate effort to fill those gaps because there is no locus of responsibility among all the various agencies. The editorial quality of publications is a matter of individual agency determination. The purpose and slant of any given material is arrived at by the agency according to the prevailing concept of its own mission at the time. The current role of the various agencies is thus a limited one of producing and disseminating materials but in a largely uncoordinated fashion.

Potentially, the agencies could make a good deal of material available of direct value to the public as well as the press, educators and others who have multiple impacts on consumers. These materials should be current and objective with interpretations of complex concepts and phenomena. The government agencies should not attempt to produce basic educational materials (except, of course, where they directly operate educational projects) because of lack of expertise. Government is already improving its dissemination of consumer information materials through the Consumer Information Center in GSA, but the Center does not provide full coordinating, editorial, and promotional services for the agencies.

Recommendations for federal agencies include:

1. Individual agencies should undertake a self-assessment of the types of information actually and potentially available to them that could assist consumers and consumer education. They should evaluate their ability to utilize that information in their public information programs and implement necessary actions.

2. Federal agencies should avoid publications that are predominantly self serving in nature -- a close parallel to the narrow, promotional materials distributed by businesses and/or industries.

3. The Consumer Information Center, GSA, should take on editorial functions to encourage new publications, revise others, and assist agencies in producing the materials needed by consumers, teachers, and others.

State Departments of Education

The current role of state departments of education is to disseminate Part F, adult education and Title I funds for consumer education. They sometimes provide a resource person for consumer education, or initiate some inservice training. There are important exceptions to this minimal condition in Florida, Ohio, Illinois and Oregon, for example.

A potential role of the state departments is to provide technical assistance for the initiation of a state program and of local programs. Another role would be to provide direction on the use of federal funds for consumer education and to support on-going activities through curricula, evaluations, local school data exchanges, training, research and demonstration projects, materials evaluation (in lieu of federal or regional centers for this purpose), and other traditional actions of state departments. State departments will need full time staff and a clearly defined set of objectives to guide interdisciplinary efforts throughout each state.

Recommendations for immediate action by state education agencies (besides what can be done with appropriate legislative action) include:

1. Undertake an inventory of state needs and existing programs for education of consumers, K-Adult. This report should be developed with citizen direction and participation and then be provided to the legislature and the public. A conference to review the research findings may be appropriate.

2. Centralize consumer education in full time staff members on an organizational par with other specialists. One of the critical problems in state departments has been turf battles over consumer education among established academic interests in the departments.

3. At the early stage of development, inflexible curriculum guides are not a high priority. Curriculum guides available in a majority of states are uninspiring and limiting. Teachers should be given training and adequate materials to choose from before they receive curriculum outlines. Curriculum guides may be more appropriate for mini-courses taught only occasionally by teaches who otherwise specialize in other subjects.

4. Curriculum development should be interdisciplinary. There is a need for one or more focused secondary level courses where basic concepts are taught by specialized teachers. Consumption and buying are highly complex areas, however, and deserve planned approaches as do mathematics, social studies, and English, which are taught K-Adult in a phased development.

5. Opportunities for the application of concepts of traditional courses to consumer situations offer benefits to those courses as well as the consumer education program. The realism of consumer applications stimulates student interest in toll and conceptual subjects. Other curricula specialists should be encouraged to incorporate consumer materials into their programs.

Local School Systems

The variety of local school systems means their current roles are immensely different. There are some local systems, primarily large city systems, with active consumer education programs including full time staff specialists. Each local system has a large degree of autonomy and may often elect to do very little in consumer education. Most systems suffer from the bureaucratic inertia syndrome that characterize state departments and most have not made explicit decisions at all. Instead, teachers, curriculum specialists, and individual schools often have acted independently without significant school board or school superintendent backing.

The local school systems in states without mandates have certain generic problems. The following indicates specific frustrations that have been repeated literally thousands of times by teachers and others interested in local action on consumer education in classrooms:

1. New programs require some money for materials that often comes out of the teacher's pocket.

2. There are too few in-service conferences.

3. There are no local curriculum guides or outlines.

4. There are no specialists or supervisors to call upon for advice or resources. Information is not shared and each teacher must reinvent the wheel.

5. Students are confused about the combined title, "consumer and homemaking." Homemaking oriented students may have no reason to believe they need to be educated as consumers.

6. Consumer edudation in high schools is often taught by teachers in specialized departments that do not reach college preparatory students or male students.

7. Red tape ties up teachers who try to bring in speakers (even at no cost), team teach, go on field trips, do practical projects in stores, or undertake the other innovative possibilities inherent in the teaching of the subject.

8. Students get no particular reward as students for good grades in an elective subject.

9. Innovative teachers are too far removed in the bureaucratic pecking order from school boards and top administrators to influence them. Often they dare not attempt avoiding official channels.

10. No pay is provided for "unofficial" elective workshops, conferences, or meetings for interested teachers.

11. No supervisor has the responsibility or competency to determine where elective course efforts can be improved.

12. State university education departments are often unable to prepare teachers for courses that are not common to the curricula of the state's school systems.

13. Interested teachers are often forced as individuals to scramble on their own time in order to find the meetings and few resource people who can assist them.

14. Interested teachers are sometimes frustrated by the gap between the teaching opportunities in consumer education and the lack of support in the administrative system. They may drop their efforts for lack of professional satisfaction and mentally retire their interests forever.

15. Consumer education teachers are often indentified as consumer advocate zealots for trying hard to innovate.

16. Local systems without the administrative support may miss opportunities for state or federal funds for consumer education because of lack of knowledge.

17. Innovative teachers of consumer electives may be alone and without peer professional support from other teachers.

Potential roles for local systems are several. They can assure that their local populations are provided the appropriate programs. The mix of age, income, ethnic, geographic, life style and other differences in populations is different for every school district in the nation. Local systems are responsive to local populations and have the responsibility to educate those populations with available resources. That responsibility implies initiative to assure that an adequate level of consumer education is made available.

Recommendations for local systems include:

1. Identify ongoing consumer education programs, particularly teachers who have been teaching elective courses or voluntarily incorporating consumer education into their classrooms. Community programs or projects should likewise be inventoried. These persons should be brought together to assess the community effort in light of potentials. This step is unusual in that it purposefully avoids the administrative levels in order to get persons close to the students. Students might be included where feasible in this project.

2. Based on the preliminary assessment in #1 above, the school administration, school board, business and public groups, students, consumer groups, local public consumer agencies, and educational experts should review the report for appropriate action on the many problems that affect local system.

Postsecondary Education

Consumer education teachers are generally not ninety day wonders. They are two week wonders. The current role of universities in training teachers in the K-12 levels is largely nil in this area of specialization. The market for such teachers is still rather small and the lack of preparation is understandable in a sense.

The preparation of teachers is not the only function of higher education. Some students are currently receiving elective courses of questionable professional value in personal finance, consumer economics, and home economics that are oriented toward helping individual consumers. Later, they may try to teach with these inadequate courses as their only training.

Community, vocational, and technical postsecondary schools have developed programs aimed at students as consumers that are similar in purpose to colleges and universities. On the whole, there is more evidence of innovation in these schools than in the four year universities.*

Potential roles for postsecondary education should include both individual and professional preparation. While consumer education for the individual is often viewed as omnipurposeful, the reality is that postsecondary students are a varied lot who will enter many different occupations and professions with their variety of accompanying life styles. Individual Diversity should be recognized by tailoring courses and curricula to the students.

Teacher preparation can no longer be haphazard. Data on the numbers and types of positions available (and likely to become available) must be collected, and training should respond to present and projected needs. Currently, many closely related departments in colleges and universities do not prepare students for the likely possibility that they will be called upon part-time to teach consumer education courses, mini-courses, or work with some consumer materials in their courses.

*Consumers Union Consumer Education Materials Project. Consumer Education in Junior and Community Colleges, Postsecondary Vocational and Technical Institutes (Mt. Vernon, New York: Consumers Union), 1972.

Professional preparation for non-teaching careers is primarily a responsibility of postsecondary institutions. Career preparation may range from administrative positions in consumer offices to complaint investigators. Consumer journalism and public information work are career areas related to consumer education. While the market for consumer positions exists and has grown several hundred percent in the past decade, there are few non-teaching consumer affairs professional degrees in existence. The University of Wisconsin has an undergraduate degree for this purpose introduced in Fall, 1976. The Wisconsin program is interdisciplinary, relying heavily on home economics, economics, law, business, journalism, and the social sciences.*

Recommendations for postsecondary education are:

1. Provide research leadership in the states and nationally to assess the types of needs for consumer education and to evaluate existing and proposed programs.

2. Provide expertise to state and local school systems in providing in-service teacher training programs.

3. Evaluate the need for changes in existing teacher degree programs to incorporate preparation for some consumer education.

4. Evaluate the developing need for new degree programs to prepare teachers for full-time consumer education teaching positions in some states.

5. Evaluate the developing need for career preparation in non-teaching consumer affairs positions.

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*The definitive study of career opportunities in the consumer field is John R. Burton, Educational and Career Opportunities in the Consumer Field, University of Utah, Salt Lake City, Utah, April, 1976. Burton identifies consumer affairs professionals in government and business with a diversity of functions as well as consumer journalists, consumer counselors, researchers, and educators. See also Lillian H. Mohr, Society of Consumer Affairs Professionals in Business: A Survey of Member Interests, Aspirations and Needs, Florida State University, Tallahassee, Florida, 1976, for an indepth review of persons in business in consumer affairs activities.

Summary and Additional Observations

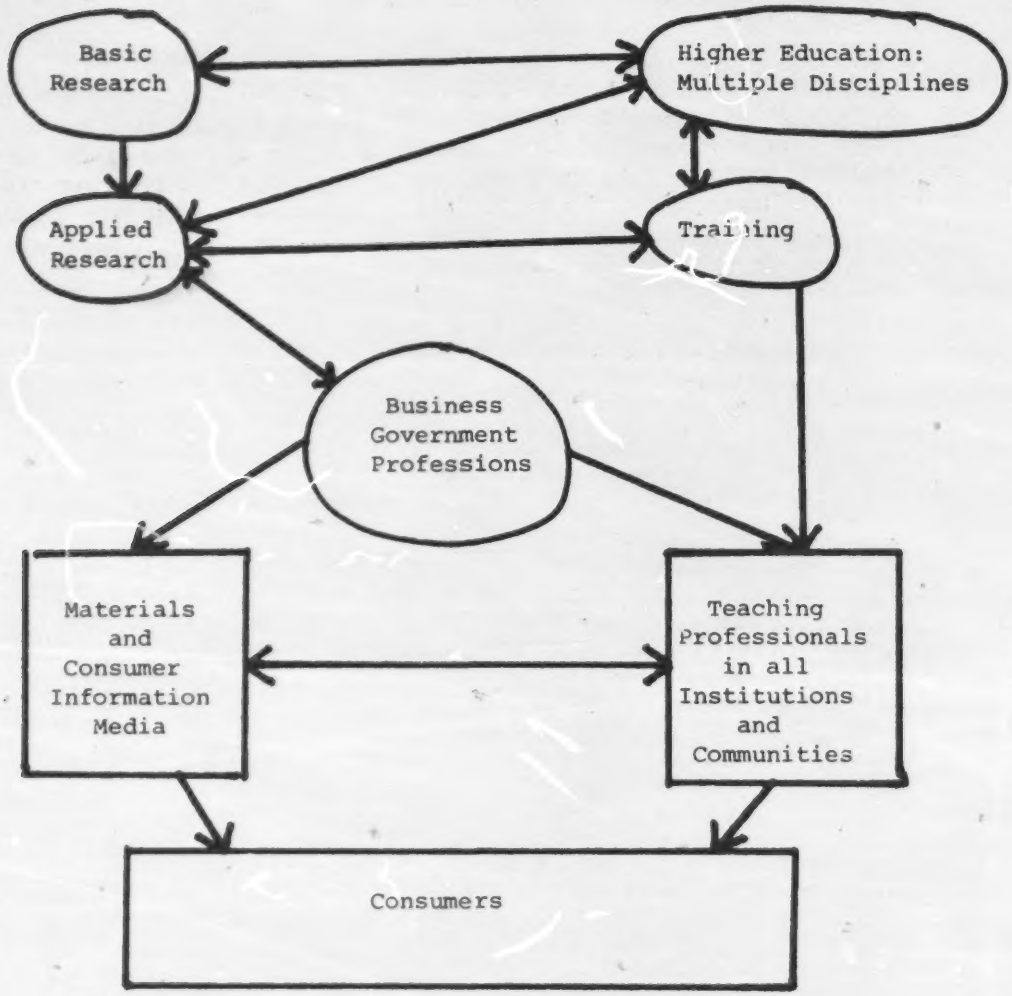
Consumer education will move forward if many individuals, groups, and agencies are involved. The premise of this development in education is not far from realization if the actions outlined earlier begin to occur. The pervasiveness of education in society, however, does require major forces to come forth to implement significant change. This is why the advocacy function is so important at this stage of development.

The thrust of some of the recommendations centers about materials and curricula content. There are problems with the quality of materials that are available. The quantity of print materials is enormous from government, business, and other sources, but the distribution is haphazard and inefficient. Broadcast and print materials are increasingly extensive, but like booklets and flyers, many are not designed by persons familiar with the educational needs of consumers.

Figure II illustrates the primary systems for developing a body of knowledge in the subject area. The weak links are in the applied research and the educational materials development areas. The essential roles of the teaching professional and information media are evident as they are the only points of contacts with consumers. The supportive roles of educational institutions and school systems are not shown in Figure II. Feedback from students as consumers of education and their involvement in policy-making are implicit.

Figure II

Creation and Dissemination
of Consumer Education Knowledge and Concepts:
An Idealized View



Alternative Futures for Consumer Education

"Its advocates notwithstanding, consumer education as currently taught has little chance to transform people into either informed or politically active consumers."

-- Lucy Black Creighton

The consumer education movement has not shown signs of a decisive turn in any of the basic directions open to it for the past several years. As it has not institutionalized itself yet, the field could recede again as it did in the two decades following World War II.

The basic choices for development depend first on whether the field gains its own identity and constituency. Several identities are possible including an open affiliation with the consumer movement or an identification as a major branch of economic education. Should no independent character develop, consumer education is likely to continue to be a theme or strain of education which appears in a variety of manifestations as it does today.

In sum, therefore, the five basic options are:

A. Identified Discipline

1. Education division of political consumerism: Advocate

If consumer education attains this flavor, it will not be because of current or past efforts of consumer advocate organizations. The advocate role is not hard to identify: educators will espouse the causes of consumer advocacy ranging from utility rate reform, elimination of many food additives, and truth laws in fields such as credit and packaging to proposals in favor of the elimination of certain federal agencies or in favor of lower prices for telephone service.

2. Division of economic, education: Defender.

   The defender of the system role implied in this alternative is already seen in the inclusion of consumer education units in free enterprise or economic education in some jurisdictions. The consumer educator who teaches the virtues of free enterprise or extols the affirmative side of the business system will have difficulty choosing positions or remaining unbiased in conflicts between consumers and business. Under a free enterprise approach, the consumer would be led to understand the necessity of adequate corporate profits rather than consistent analysis of how to cope with the profit-seeking seller in the most advantageous way.

3. Defined by educational needs of consumers.

   This option is not clear. It is in effect whatever else consumer education decides to become rather than either of the first two options.

B. Not Identified Discipline

4. Ill-defined mixture of applications (current situation).

   In this scenario, consumer education is merely a residual effect of the consumer movement. The same reaction can be expected to civil rights, terrorism, women rights, or CB radio usage as they rise and fall in the public's attention.

5. Decline or increase as fortunes of consumerism change, but without any special educational characteristics.

   The choice to be an accidental auxilliary of the consumer movement is not a choice at all. It means that while consumer issues are important to society that educators will adapt to it in non-committal forms. Some educational organizations, businesses, and/or governmental agencies will have major efforts reflecting their own interest; others will do little or nothing.

The third option is the most desirable, but it implies that strong and effective forces shape consumer education to the desired dimensions. As the field of study is only in formative stages, the purposeful intervention of government and education at this stage could make some difference. In other words, consumer education can become whatever it is deliberately shaped to be.

Hopefully, this paper suggests forms for a consciously designed consumer education system under the third option.

Postscript

Perhaps it is time in the development of a nation faced with the increasing necessity of efficiency and temperance in its use of its natural resources to reconsider its profiligate ways. Consumer education offers the opportunity for citizens to exercise an informed judgment about the use of the outputs of the economic system. The U.S. can raise its standard of living by improving its buying choices perhaps more effectively in some ways than by merely raising its gross national product. Consumer education offers an opportunity for better individual expression within the limits of given resources.

It is time to examine a possible new national priority. Consumer education needs to be rescued from the image of smart shopping at the supermarket to be a central ingredient of education for living in American society.

The Author

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